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Letter dated 24 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

With reference to the meeting of the Security Council held on 18 February 2016, in which the report of the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group was presented to the Security Council by the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009), and in the light of the unwarranted comments made by some members, I wish to register Eritrea's deep concern regarding the unjust sanctions imposed on the people of Eritrea. At the outset, Eritrea welcomes the call made by several members of the Security Council to lift the unjust and unfair sanctions.

My delegation seizes this opportunity to reiterate that the sanctions imposed on the people of Eritrea for the last seven years, railroaded by certain major powers, are politically motivated to achieve the following objectives:

(a) Diverting attention from Ethiopia's occupation of sovereign Eritrean territory, including the town of Badme;

(b) Weakening Eritrean economic and military capabilities; and

(c) Advancing a regime change agenda.

It is worth recalling that the sanctions against Eritrea were justified under two pretexts, "support to al-Shabaab in Somalia" and a "border dispute with Djibouti", invoking concern for regional and international peace and security. These two justifications have long been proven to be non-existent. The Monitoring Group in its reports has stated that it has found no evidence of Eritrean support to al-Shabaab. Eritrea welcomes the Monitoring Group's acknowledgement, even if belated. Moreover, the Presidents of Djibouti and Eritrea signed an agreement on 6 June 2010, entrusting the Government of Qatar to undertake mediation efforts. This seven-point comprehensive agreement, which was also endorsed by the Security Council and the African Union, deals with all issues, including prisoners of war and missing persons. The Qatari army is already deployed in the Eritrea-Djibouti common boarder. Eritrea is fully committed to the Qatari mediation process.

These two facts must be sufficient to rescind the unfair and unjust sanctions imposed on the people of Eritrea for the past seven years. Furthermore, at a time when there is a strong global commitment for an all-inclusive 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, maintaining sanctions against Eritrea, a developing country, is unwarranted: as stated in the Agenda, no one should be "left behind".

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However, resorting to a creative and selective interpretation of its mandate, as well as in an attempt to stretch the scope of the sanctions resolution, the Monitoring Group reported that Eritrea is supporting armed groups in Ethiopia. This persistent and unwarranted effort by the Monitoring Group to report about the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia contravenes the Security Council resolutions; hence, it must be dismissed as illicit, inappropriate and counterproductive. The Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict is not within the purview of the Monitoring Group's mandate. It was not a factor when the sanctions were imposed on Eritrea.

The Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict is an issue of the occupied and the occupier. It must be handled by the Security Council under a different agenda item. The Council must demand and compel Ethiopia to fulfil its treaty obligations and various Security Council resolutions, as well as respect the Charter of the United Nations by withdrawing from sovereign Eritrean territories, including the town of Badme.

Furthermore, Ethiopian leaders and officials publicly admit that they are hosting, financing, arming and training several subversive Eritrean groups that intermittently unleash terrorist forays against the people of Eritrea:

- On 7 July 2015, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia speaking to his Parliament said that "Ethiopia will be forced to take appropriate action against Eritrea".
- On 9 August 2014, during an interview with the Washington D.C. based Radio Tsenat, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia clearly stated that "the no-war no-peace situation with Eritrea is over. Ethiopia from now on is ready to take military action against Eritrea".
- On 17 April 2012, speaking to the Ethiopian Parliament the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi stated that "the Ethiopian Government has now decided to carry out a more active policy, taking actions against Eritrea. The action will involve using all means at Ethiopia's disposal to change the Eritrean Government. The other major area where Ethiopia will further strengthen its activity is in supporting Eritreans in their campaign to change the Government".

The Monitoring Group is well aware that the above belligerent statements by Ethiopian officials constitute an act of aggression against Eritrea that cannot be downplayed or glossed over.

The fact is, Ethiopia continues to occupy sovereign Eritrean territories in flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the "final and binding" delimitation and demarcation decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. It must also be underlined that Ethiopia's continued breach of international law and the provisions of the Agreement between the Government of the State of Eritrea and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (the Algiers Agreement), guaranteed by the United Nations and the African Union, require appropriate punitive measures by the Security Council. In accordance with the Charter and international law, Eritrea has every right to reject occupation and to defend itself against any occupier. Therefore, the Monitoring Group's focus on alleged acts by Eritrea against Ethiopia is morally unconscionable and legally incompatible with its mandate.

The report of the Monitoring Group stated that the Group had received unconfirmed reports of the presence of Eritrean soldiers in Yemen fighting alongside the Arab coalition. This allegation is patently false.

But here again, the Monitoring Group's proclivity to dwell on malicious and fabricated hearsay to maintain the harassment of Eritrea is crystal clear. Who are the sources and what is the underlying motive? Is this a continuation of presenting fabricated allegations against Eritrea by the Group? The Group in its 2006 report stated that Eritrea had sent 2,000 soldiers to Somalia. In spite of unequivocal evidence that there were no Eritrean soldiers in Somalia, this fabricated report has never been retracted by the Group. So, is this another replay of the 2006 episode of inserting fabricated accusations to serve a specific purpose? And in any case, what is the motive and hurry to include an unconfirmed allegation in the report? Why does the Monitoring Group insert in its report innuendos and attempts to insinuate a "potential" violation? This is a deliberate disinformation campaign.

Just for the record, nowhere in the Security Council resolution is Eritrea restricted or sanctioned from participating or joining any initiative, alliance or coalition in the fight against global extremism and terrorism. Eritrea, as a country with 1,200 km of coastline and more than 350 islands, with a 50 per cent Christian and 50 per cent Muslim population, has a long and close maritime border with Yemen. The situation in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, including in Yemen, impacts and affects Eritrea. The unfortunate developments in Yemen are compounded by the spread of extremism and terrorism in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region. In this regard, the importance of sustained engagement between countries in the region is indeed too palpable to merit emphasis. At a time when combating global extremism and terrorism is at the top of the global agenda that is endorsed by all Member States of the United Nations, Eritrea's cooperation with the countries of the region must be commended and not restricted.

Other coordinated and distorted information that is peddled by some quarters is Eritrea's "refusal" to allow the Monitoring Group to visit the country and to cooperate. These are lame excuses and pretexts that are advanced to maintain the unjust sanctions against the people of Eritrea. Just for the record, the Monitoring Group has visited Eritrea twice and was given all types of access to various government officials, financial institutions and civil society organizations, etc. In those meetings, the Group was provided with information and explanations on its queries. However, instead of reflecting its interactions and reporting on matters that are within its mandate, in violation of the Charter and the Security Council resolution, which clearly reaffirms its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence and unity of Eritrea, resorting to its demonizing and disinformation campaign, the Group chose to dwell on Eritrea's internal political, social and economic situation. Eritrea's military and security capabilities and secrets supported by satellite pictures were presented for anyone to use or read.

On the issue of cooperation, Eritrea has fully cooperated with the Monitoring Group and has also faithfully responded orally and in writing to all its queries. In the past three years alone, 15 formal and informal meetings, including interaction through three videoconferences, have taken place between Eritrean Government officials and the Monitoring Group. Therefore, statements by some quarters such as that Eritrea must fully cooperate with the Monitoring Group are, once again, factually wrong and a pretext to continue the unjust sanctions.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates its appeal to the members of the Security Council to immediately and unconditionally lift the unjust and unfair sanctions imposed on the people of Eritrea, in consideration of the following:

(a) The justification concerning Eritrean support to al-Shabaab has been proven to be non-existent as the Monitoring Group has ascertained that it has found no evidence of Eritrean support to al-Shabaab;

(b) The Eritrea-Djibouti issue is being handled by the Government of Qatar and Eritrea remains committed to mediation;

(c) Eritrea has in good faith fully cooperated with the Monitoring Group and has allowed it to visit Eritrea twice;

(d) The growing threats of terrorism and extremism in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region, in particular the developments in Yemen, and the implications for Eritrea's security.

Furthermore, in the interests of peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region, Eritrea calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by demanding that Ethiopia withdraw from sovereign Eritrean territories, including the town of Badme.

I would be most grateful if this letter could be brought to the attention of the members of the Council and be circulated as a document of the Council.

(*Signed*) Girma Asmerom **Tesfay**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative